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ABSTRACT

One of the best guarantees of a child's success in school is his or her parents' involvement in education. This resource guide provides information in the following areas: (1) family types; (2) expectations of parents, teachers, and administrators; (3) barriers encountered by parents and teachers; (4) home environment improvements through family education and home activities; and (5) school environment improvements through volunteer programs and school councils. Existing programs are reviewed. Strategies for state action are outlined. Recommendations in each area are offered for teachers, administrators, and parents. Resources in each area are provided. Participants in the "Drawing in the Family" Invitational Conference (held on May 12, 1988 in St. Louis, Missouri) and Project Planning Meeting (held on January 22, 1988) are listed. Personal anecdotes and childrens' illustrations accompany the text. (BJV)

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Drawing in the Family

Family Involvement in the Schools

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With Foreword by
John Ashcroft
ECS 1987–88 Chairman and Governor of Missouri

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Drawing in the Family

Family Involvement in the Schools

August 1988

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The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295. The Washington office is in the Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, Suite 248, Washington, D.C. 20001.

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Foreword

One of the best guarantees of a child's success in school is his or her parents' involvement in education. Parents are their children's first teachers, and their attitudes about learning and school influence the education of their children from early years through graduation.

In recent years, the nation's governors, educators and many other leaders have focused on making schools better. States and communities have worked hard to improve student achievement and make the nation more competitive in the world market. Those efforts have been highly successful. But now it is time to broaden the effort and bring in the individuals that research tells us are the most critical in helping students achieve—their families.

Involved families give children more opportunities. Working with children at home reinforces what's taught at school. When parents show that they care about learning, children care more about it, too. When parents show that learning is important, children try harder. When parents take responsibility for the learning process, they forge a strong bond with the schools.

As this reports points out, research is solid on the fact that children whose parents are involved in their education achieve at higher levels than those whose parents are not.

Many families, however, are not, and have not been, involved in their children's education, for a variety of reasons. Families are changing in America and some of those changes have made it more difficult for parents to find the time and energy to work with schools. The number of single-parent families, for example, has risen 50% over the past decade. Seventy percent of married mothers with school-age children are employed. In addition, American families are culturally and ethnically diverse, and they speak nearly every language on earth.

This diversity presents challenges for the schools, challenges that are not insurmountable by any means, but challenges that may require new types of efforts and new ways of drawing families in.

Parents have said they want to help their children learn. They want to know how they can be more involved with their children's schools. They want more information about the progress of their children and how they can help. They want more input and exposure to what their children are learning. How can schools stimulate and respond to this interest and use it for the benefit of students?

I believe we can bring more families into the wonder of learning. There are three paths toward that goal. We must **involve parents from the very beginning of parenthood**. We must **raise the nation's consciousness** of the importance of parental involvement. And we must **reach out to parents at the local level.**

This report challenges state policy makers to enact policies that help families become more involved in the education of their children. It describes what some states are doing and offers a host of examples of the three paths.

While the issue of family involvement in the schools will, and should, remain a local concern, state policy makers must consider ways to promote and support it at the state level. Family and community involvement must be viewed as an integral part of the overall effort to help students achieve.

What **can** states do? First of all, they can take a leadership role in making their citizens aware of the positive impact parents can have on their child's success in school. And they can be responsible for developing policies and strategies to encourage family involvement in education. States must help remove the barriers to involvement and assist schools in working with families.

If our goal of a greater home/school partnership comes about, not only will families and schools benefit, our nation also will reap the rewards. But most importantly, our children will benefit by receiving a better, fuller education and an understanding of its importance.

John Ashcroft

John Ashcroft,
Governor of Missouri
1987-88 ECS Chairman

Introduction

The problems facing American education are not problems of the school alone. To be resolved successfully, they must address the relationship of the home and the school.

Dorothy Rich

Numerous studies show that it is crucial for parents — all parents — to be involved in their children's education, both in the school and in the home. In a summary of the research, Anne Henderson, an associate with the National Committee for Citizens in Education, found that "the evidence is beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools . . . Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved."

A 1987 U.S. Department of Education report, **Education and the Family**, noted that even casual family learning activities, such as teaching children about numbers and the alphabet through games, are "the stuff of which academic achievement is most naturally made." The report draws on research that contrasted the family life of high- and low-scoring poor, minority youngsters.

The study found that the high-scoring students had regular chores and homework schedules and that their parents regularly involved them in conversations, games, singing and other activities. The low-performing students had few home responsibilities, little parental supervision and little time in which they interacted with their families.

The benefits of parental involvement apply to children of all ages. In **What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?**, researchers noted that "mealtime conversations about the news of the day or television programs or movies can stimulate children's curiosity and verbal skills; tales of the family's history can develop their sense of the past; a family's excursion to a play or a museum can open new worlds to the imagination. These are some of the ways that parents can enrich the education received by their children."

Researcher Nancy Darling found that adolescents exposed to challenging adults show superior cognitive performance. However, the influence was much greater if the adult was a parent.

In general, research supports common sense and provides evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and participation at school affect their children's achievement. Other studies show it also helps parents understand the work of the school, improves communication between parents and their children and builds school/community relationships. Because of this, policy makers, teachers, administrators and parents are calling for more parent support for and involvement in the schools and with their children — from birth through college. The U.S. Congress this year established three new programs that either require or encourage parent involvement (see last chapter). While most parental involvement efforts focus on parents of preschool children, some are starting to seek the participation of parents of college students as well.

The National Association of College Admissions Counselors, for example, has called for more information, support and programs to help parents understand and select from the educational options available to their children. Said Frank Burtnett, executive director, "All the trends point to an unavoidable conclusion: the role of parents throughout the elementary and high school years will become much more important in the admission counseling process."

But true parental involvement will be hard to achieve unless schools take the steps necessary to break down the barriers parents face in working with the schools, and create an environment that makes families welcome. Families, in turn, must do their part in cultivating a relationship with schools that supports education and transmits the value of education to their children.

Family Types

The first step for policy makers is to recognize the variety of American families and to acknowledge their different needs and problems. If anything, American families are diverse — running the gamut from single-parent households to dual-career couples to step families. Within this spectrum fall numerous variations because of culture — white, black, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American. These variations create a crazy quilt of expectations on the part of families and a need for greater understanding and aid on the part of schools.

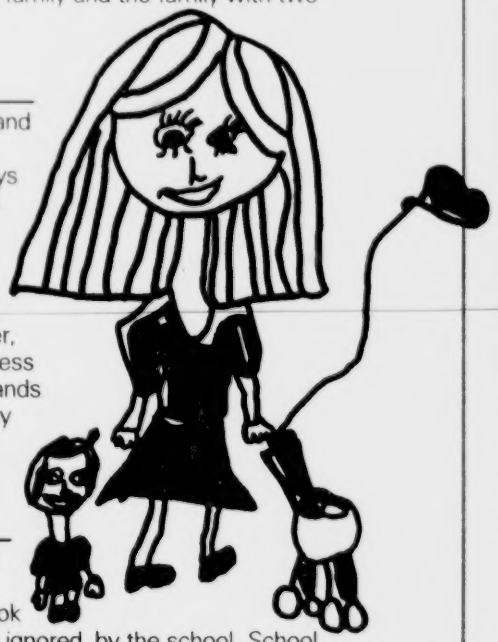
What do these new American families look like? And what does this mean for schools and policy makers?

Research defines several basic types of families in the United States today. The family with a husband who works and wife who stays at home is not typical; the single-parent family and the family with two working parents are statistically the norms.

Single-Parent Families

Nearly 15 million children under age 18 live in a single-parent family, and nearly six out of 10 born in the early 1980s will do so for at least a year, according to a 1987 U.S. House of Representatives' report. Some surveys show that teachers report some difficulty in working with single parents because they often do not know which parent to contact.

To compound the problems, there has been a significant increase over the last 25 years in the number of families headed by women. By 1986, this percentage had reached 19%, up from 7% in 1960, according to the House report. Because female-headed families typically are poorer, more children are being affected by poverty. Single parents often have less time to work with the schools because they must juggle so many demands alone. At the same time, persons at the lower socioeconomic levels may feel intimidated in dealing with teachers and other school professionals whom they may regard as unapproachable professionals.



Noncustodial Parents

Ninety percent of American children whose parents are divorced are placed in the sole custody of their mothers. Most noncustodial parents are men, and many are demanding the right to be more than a checkbook for their children. They complain they are often overlooked, or purposely ignored, by the school. School officials, on the other hand, may find themselves caught in the middle of a conflict between two parents.

Although most children still are placed with their mothers, the number living with their fathers more than doubled between 1970 and 1986, the U.S. House study showed. This trend will require schools to be more aware of differing custody arrangements.

Families with Two Wage Earners

The U.S. House also found that almost 70% of married mothers with school-age children are employed. In 1970, only 24% of all married mothers with infant children 1 year old or younger were working or looking for work. By 1986, half of these mothers were in the work force. The two-wage earner family means that parents are often not available during normal school hours to take part in events, activities or conferences.

Two-Parent Families with One Wage Earner

Although the two-parent family with a single wage earner was considered typical in 1965, only 7% of today's schoolchildren come from such families, according to education demographer Harold Hodgkinson. However, some schools continue to deal with parents and schedule events as though this were still the norm.

Joined or Blended Families

Within five years after divorce, four of every seven white children and one of every eight black children are in blended families, family sociologist Bert Adams found. Two-thirds of all children born in the early 1980s will probably live with a step-parent, said Paul Glick, former senior demographer with the U.S. Bureau of the Census. This quadruples the problems for schools, which may find they have four parents to contact for one child.

Homeless Families

The image of the homeless population as a collection of alcoholics, drug addicts and the mentally ill is no longer a valid one. In fact, less than half of the nation's homeless fall into these groups, and half a million homeless persons are children.

A recent 26-city study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 22% of homeless people have part) or full-time jobs. One-third are families with young children. In fact, the fastest growing group of homeless are children under age 6. The Child Welfare League reports that many — 43% — of these children do not attend school.

Homeless parents have obvious problems that prevent them from working with schools, and schools may be unable to locate the parents when needed.

Teenage Parents

More than 1 million American teenage girls become pregnant each year — one in 10. Approximately half will give birth, according to statistics cited in a 1987 **Phi Delta Kappan** article. Of these girls, half fail to complete high school, meaning schools must help the girls work through their difficulties as parents if they expect to keep them in school.

Minority Families

If current demographic patterns and birth rates continue, one-third of the American population will be nonwhite by the year 2000. Racial and ethnic minorities may fit any of the above family structures; they also exhibit some different characteristics than other dominant American family forms. Traditionally, racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have less power, wealth, social status and education than other Americans. For these reasons, and because of cultural differences, minorities sometimes have trouble working with schools dominated by whites.

Projections indicate that schools will have larger minority enrollments in the future. Black youth are expected to make up 15.2% of all youths by 1996, and Native American and Asian and Pacific Islanders should constitute nearly 4% of the youth population. Hispanic youths are expected to be 11% to 13% of the total youth population.

Tapping the Talent

What does this variety of families mean to schools? It means schools have a greater wealth of resources to draw upon. Parents with different lifestyles and forms and from different cultures possess a plethora of experience and knowledge. Tapping this talent and building on parents' strengths is the challenge.

All parents, even those least comfortable or equipped for their role as parents, want the best for their children. However, some parents, for various reasons, may not want to be involved in the schools. Others may not have the time — at least not under certain school structures. Most, however, if helped to feel welcome and comfortable in the school, if respected and guided about how they can help their child, if given opportunities, are willing to work with the school.

How can the state facilitate greater interaction? The key is to concentrate on policy designed to improve student achievement. Parental involvement alone will not solve a school's problems. It must be part of an overall scheme that includes commitment to quality for all students, unity of purpose, sound leadership and good instruction. Where this is the case, parents will be seen as part of the solution.

As Mary Jackson Willis, director of the School Council Assistance Project at the University of South Carolina, said: "The missing link in education reform is not so much 'parent involvement,' but the lack of formal state or national policy to give parent involvement proper recognition and funding as a specific research-based strategy for school improvement. The pedagogy for parent involvement is in place. The politics are not."

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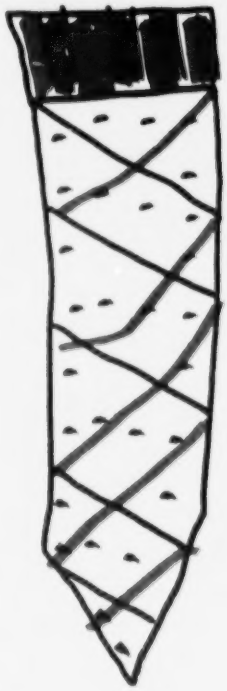
Connecting Families and Schools

Nothing is more important to success in schools than the quality of relationships between and among students, teachers and parents. Yet many reformers treat learning as a purely mechanical process.

James P. Comer, M.D.

Family Ties in Education



The Expectations

Just as families and their needs vary, so do the needs of communities, schools and teachers. Finding the right fit between schools and families requires careful planning and compromise at the local level, and broad, visionary and flexible policies at the state level.

To make effective state policy that aids family involvement in the schools, it is important for state policy makers to know what parents, teachers and administrators expect, what keeps those expectations from being met, and what types of opportunities smooth the path for a better home/school relationship.

Research and surveys of parents have turned up some basic needs and desires that parents have from their children's schools. Likewise, teachers and administrators report some very specific expectations of what parent involvement in the schools should include. Unfortunately, those needs and desires don't always mesh with what the other groups want, particularly when it relates to the academic side of schools.

They do, however, have the same ultimate focus — the child and his or her education. Policy makers, educators and parents must not lose sight of the fact that it is the children whose interests must be considered first in deliberations about school policy, including policy about family involvement. The issue is how to channel disparate ideas about how things should be done into a united effort that does the most for students.

What Parents Want

Parents in general are interested in helping their children. This means working with the schools on several levels, but they often don't know how to go about it. First, they want to know what is going on in

the school and how their child is doing. Second, they want to know how the "system" works and how they can be a part of it. Third, they want to know what they can do with their child at home to help him or her achieve in school.

The child/school relationship:

According to a variety of sources, including the Metropolitan Life survey of teachers and parents, parents want information about:

Curriculum — What content is their child learning and how is it being presented? What courses are offered? **Goals** — What are the goals of the school and the teachers? **Attendance** — Is their child showing up everyday and attending every class? If not, why not and what can be done about it?

Achievement — How is their child doing in school? Parents want both good news as well as the bad. **Choices** — What course choices do their children have, and how are the students counseled to make those choices? **Extracurricular activities** — What is being offered? **Changes** — What changes are being made in the curriculum, grading, discipline policy, extracurricular activities, homework policies, class sizes, etc., and why?

The parent/school relationship:

Parents want to learn:

How to work with the educational system at the district, school and classroom levels; **how they can be more involved** at all levels of education, including high school; **how they can spend more time** in school, and what they can contribute; and **how to talk** to school officials.

The parent/school/child relationship:

Parents want to know:

How they can teach or help their child at home — What activities are useful; how they can help with homework; what environment their child needs at home to study; **how other parents** feel about the school and their children's behavior or achievement — what support groups are available, for instance?

What Teachers Want

The Metropolitan Life and other surveys report that teachers want parents to realize that teachers are devoted to helping their children learn. However, they can't do it alone, and they want parents to know that parents, too, have an important role to play.

Teachers want parents to:

Share responsibilities — Read to and tutor their children at home; motivate their children to be interested in learning; contact teachers about elements of or changes in the child's environment or situation that may affect his or her school performance; discipline their children more; don't expect the school to have sole responsibility; reinforce at home what is taught at school.

Participate in school — Attend school meetings and support school programs; serve as volunteers when possible; be willing to be consulted about changes in nonacademic school policies such as discipline or extracurricular activities. Teachers are less willing, however, to have parents involved in decisions about academic areas, such as what subjects are taught, grading, class size and homework.

What Administrators Want

A recent study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that high school principals expect parents to play different roles than teachers and parents desire.

- Two-thirds (64%) said the major role for the parents should be fund raising.
- More than half (54%) said that parents should be used as clerical volunteers.
- Fifty-one percent said parents should help write student disciplinary rules.
- Forty-nine percent want parents to help supervise student activities.
- As few as 26% want parents as aides in the classrooms.
- Only 21% want parents to evaluate textbooks and curriculum.
- And only 3% want parents to help select school personnel.

The Barriers

Meeting the varied expectations of parents, teachers and administrators is not easy. However, many

schools are finding that it is possible — if parents understand the school's limitations and if schools perceive what obstacles parents may face. Misunderstandings, miscommunication and mismatches in schedules are often the culprits — not lack of interest on the parts of parents or schools — when there is a problem in the home/school relationship.

Parents report they find it difficult to participate in the schools as fully as they would like because of obstacles at home, at work and in the school. Teachers face their own work-related obstacles. Both sides sometimes have negative opinions of the other.

What Parents Say

Work-related problems. Parents' work hours usually begin before school and last beyond the time school is out, leaving no time to participate as volunteers or attend school events. Employers often do not allow parents to take time off for school activities without losing pay.

Home-related problems. Parents with small children sometimes have a difficult time finding day-time care in order to free them to visit the schools. In addition, many parents speak a language other than English and are unable to communicate with the schools. Some parents, especially those from rural areas or those whose children are bused to other parts of town,
lack transportation to get to the school.

School-related obstacles. Notice of meetings and events sometimes comes too late for parents to make the arrangement necessary to attend. Mismatches in the schedules of teachers and parents often make it impossible for some parents to meet with teachers. One-third of public school parents say they would prefer to meet in the evenings, but only 9% of teachers say that would be convenient for them.

Parents say that some schools continue to be insensitive to parents by referring to "broken" homes or contacting only mothers instead of fathers and mothers.

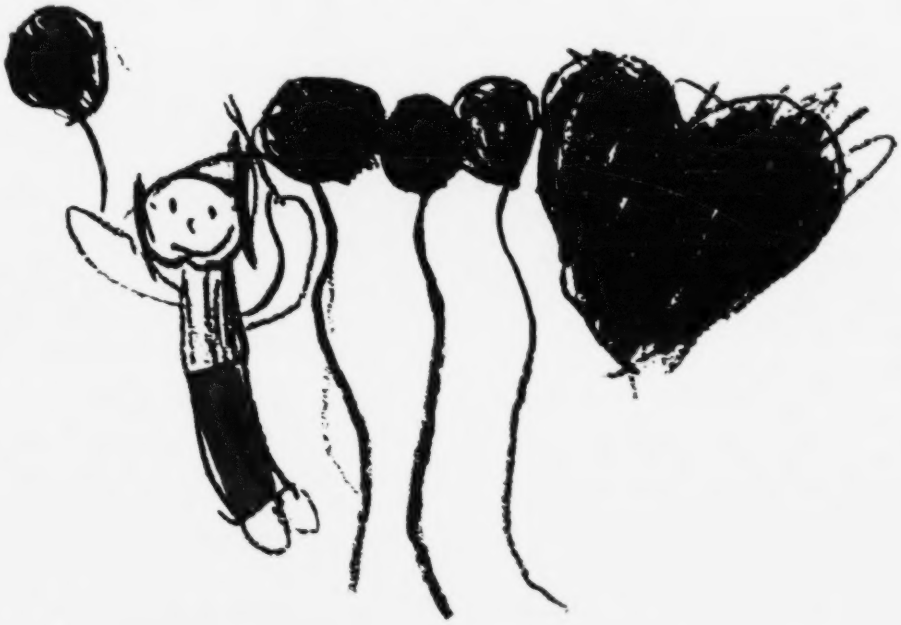
Personal obstacles. Parents with low incomes or little education often feel they are not qualified to talk with teachers. Poor school experiences of their own may make them uncomfortable visiting the school or talking with teachers.

Rick's Story

Divorced when his son Andrew was 3, Rick was determined from the beginning to stay involved in Andrew's life. Despite Rick's attempt to get joint custody, his son, like 90% of children of divorced parents, was placed in the sole custody of his mother. Rick became a weekend visitor in his child's life.

Rick argues that his visitation time is too short to maintain a close relationship with his son. He turned down promotions that would have required him to move to other parts of the country so he could stay close to Andrew. While Rick is willing to make sacrifices, he is resentful that others continue to view him as an occasional parent, a checkbook.

Much of his anger is directed toward the school. Because he is not the primary caretaker, Rick is not given the same treatment as Andrew's mother. He says he is seldom informed of upcoming school events, his son's progress, parent-teacher conferences or other news. When Andrew was chosen "most artistic" student in his class, Rick was not informed until after the awards ceremony.



What Teachers Say

The most common reason teachers give for not involving parents more is they think parents are not as available or interested as they should be. In addition, they believe that some parents have unrealistic expectations or negative attitudes toward the school.

Teachers recognize that some parents are afraid to approach the school or are uninformed about how to help their children. However, teachers themselves feel inadequate or overwhelmed when it comes to working with many parents. A majority say they have felt uneasy or reluctant about approaching parents to talk about their child, largely because they have not received sufficient training in how to work with parents.

Schools often create another barrier for teachers who would like to involve parents more effectively. Many teachers cite paperwork and cumbersome systems as adding to the time burdens of working closely with parents. Because many teachers also are parents themselves, they have the same home responsibilities that keep parents from having the time to participate in evening activities.

Creating Opportunities

How can the expectations and strengths of parents be used to improve student learning? How can schools be effectively structured to encourage meaningful participation by parents? Teachers, administrators and parents themselves all have responsibilities. The first step is to create opportunities for involvement to take place.

What Teachers Can Do

Teachers can be particularly invaluable in helping parents work with their children at home and in inspiring them to be more involved. For example, they can suggest activities parents can do with their children at home, such as reading or discussing specific television shows with them, or doing certain activities related to the students' schoolwork.

To keep parents apprised of their children's school performance, and to solicit their support, teachers may ask parents to sign contracts pledging to supervise and assist their children in completing their homework assignments. Students can also be asked to do assignments that involve interviewing their parents.

To better understand how parental involvement fits into their school, teachers should learn the research about families as educators and the strategies for reaching and teaching adults.

What Administrators Can Do

Administrators can play a crucial role in encouraging school/home collaborations. Certain procedures and policies can spur teachers to work more with parents. Perhaps most important, administrators should set the stage by making sure teachers and all other staff members know that parental involvement is an essential ingredient in academic success and that parents are welcome in the school.

Policies should encourage teachers to communicate with parents on a regular basis about their curriculum plans, expectations for homework, grading policies and how parents can help with the child's learning process. Teachers should be asked to assign homework that parents can help with and should be required to have at least one conference a year with each student's parents. Teachers should also be urged, however, to communicate with parents for reasons other than poor performance or behavior.

Administrators can also set the tone for how school officials should treat parents and should support activities and services that make it easier for parents to understand and be more active in the school. For example, many schools are holding meetings in the evening to enable more parents to attend. Breakfasts for working parents make them realize their opinions are valued. Outreach programs can bring in parents who normally don't attend school functions or get involved.

Orientation classes will help both students and their families better understand and feel a part of the school. Posted hours when the principal and other building-level administrators are available to talk with students and their parents make parents feel welcome.

Perhaps the strongest welcome parents can receive is to be encouraged to visit classes, a step that may strengthen the parents' positive feelings about the curriculum and the faculty.

Any program to bring parents in will benefit from efforts to help parents get there physically. Some schools allow parents without transportation to ride the school bus to school. Others provide babysitting services during events or meetings.

If parental involvement is expected, it generally occurs. Schools that expect every parent to perform at least one volunteer function a year have good success; that policy makes it clear that parents have responsibilities, too.

What Parents Can Do

Parents can take the initiative in getting involved by showing the child they are interested in his or her school activities and performance and by seeing that the school has all the information it needs about the student.

Parents should meet with the child's teacher early in the school year to discuss mutual expectations, any special problem or needs their child has or other concerns such as discipline methods. Throughout the year, they should maintain regular communication with the school and come to conferences prepared to ask questions and listen to the teacher's comments about their child. They should also keep the school informed of changes in the child's life that may affect his or her schoolwork.

Parents' most important role may be at home. They should communicate with their child about various aspects of school and be sure the child has a home environment and space conducive to study.

In addition to talking with school officials and seeing that the child is supported in his or her studies at home, parents can offer other services to the school. Every parent has a talent that can be put to good use, be it typing, leading a club or serving as a resource person in a classroom.

Susan's Story

Susan is a single mother, working full-time to support her two children, 3rd-grade Theresa and 3-year-old Jimmy. She must be at work by 8 a.m., so she leaves the house at 7:30 to drop Jimmy off at day care. Theresa's school bus doesn't pick her up until 8:15, meaning Susan must rely on a neighbor to take care of Theresa until then.

Susan missed a half day of work last week to attend Theresa's school conference. Today, the day care called to say Jimmy is sick. Because Susan has no one to care for him, she must leave work. She knows that she won't be able to take off time to attend Theresa's school play next week, which is only staged during school hours, and she fears her employer will be angry that she is leaving work again. In addition, her sick leave allows her to miss work only if **she** is ill, meaning she will lose pay if she takes off or will be forced to lie and say she is the one sick. Susan feels like she spends too much time juggling her work and family schedules. She lives in constant fear that one of the kids will get sick, or that she will lose one of her child-care arrangements. She feels guilty that she can't get more involved in Theresa's school, and that Theresa can't get involved in extra activities like the swim team at the YWCA.

Working It Out

Conscious, formal efforts to improve the home/school relationship can easily deal with most of these barriers. States across the country are successfully combatting negative attitudes. Parents are learning how to work with the schools and contribute to their children's education. Schools, through volunteer programs and training programs that teach school officials how to work with families, are finding that parents are an invaluable resource and that home-school relationships can be mutually satisfying and beneficial.

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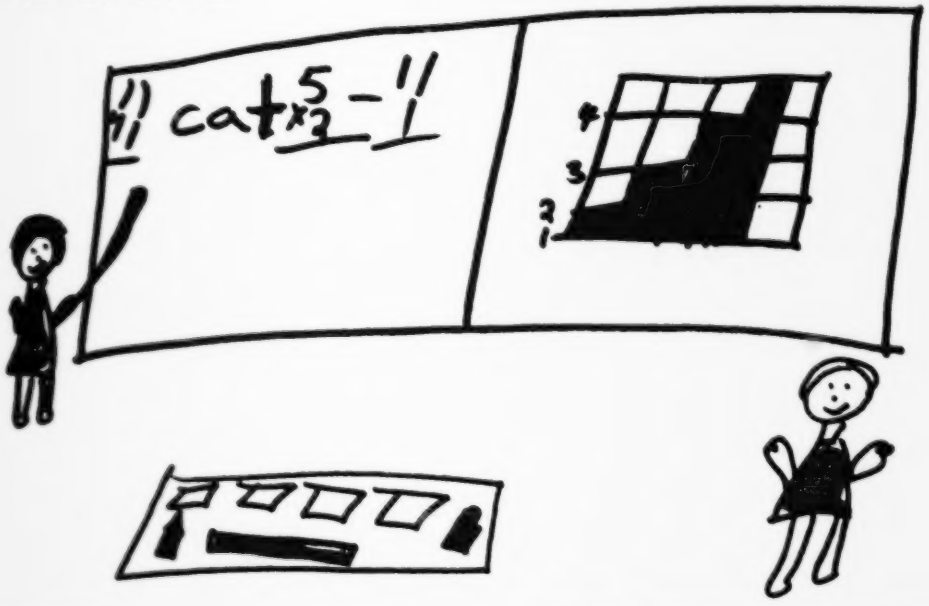


Maryella's Story

Active involvement in the schools is not always easy for all parents. For years, Maryella had been involved in her neighborhood school.

With desegregation, her ability to be involved changed dramatically. She found she had to try much harder and be much more determined to be involved. She needed to break down the barriers of the new community and the new school.

"When I first started going into the school, it was strange to see a black parent volunteering in the school. I got a funny reception. Eventually I was just another parent. But after negative experiences it takes a long time to build back up your confidence."

Improving the Home Environment

Home-based parent partnership programs . . . yield clear academic gains for students, as well as increased levels of parental interest in and support for the schools.

Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin

Efforts to improve the home/school relationship generally fall into two categories — improving the home environment and improving the school environment. The home atmosphere can be changed by assisting parents to be better parents and by teaching them how to work with their children on learning activities at home. Improving the school environment includes bringing parents in and giving them a role in what happens in the school. Both are critical forces in aiding children to achieve their maximum potential in school.

This chapter looks at ways to improve the home environment through family education and home activities. The next examines how to change the school environment by bringing in families as volunteers and members of governance councils.

Family Education

Educating and supporting parents in their efforts to guide their children is a primary way states and school districts can help improve the home environment. Studies on the impact of parent education programs show that programs that teach parents how to help their children learn result in higher achievement for the children. Preschool children whose parents were taught how to reinforce learning in the home consistently demonstrated higher achievement throughout elementary school, according to an E. E. Gotts study.

Family education programs, especially those for economically disadvantaged families, also have benefits beyond the academic achievement of the child. Good programs produce positive results for the parents as well, researcher Rhoda McShane Becher found. Among these are increased self-confidence in child-rearing abilities, better understanding of their own strengths and resources, more enjoyment working with their child, motivation to continue their education and a greater appreciation of their role as a parent.

Goals of good parent education programs are straightforward, according to a 1979 ECS study. Programs should:

- Be responsive to the needs of the school district.
- Increase parents' knowledge and their ability to assist their child in the learning process.
- Be dependent upon the interests, needs and desires of the parents.
- Assist each individual parent to fulfill his or her own potential.
- Help parents understand the complexities of education.

Parental education and training activities can range from counseling to a single training session to multiple sessions. They can deal with one topic, such as helping with homework, or extend to a number of lessons on dealing with the adolescent. Such training should focus not only on the skills for working with a child but also on academic skills necessary to understand what the child is doing. In some cases, schools are not the best agencies to offer parents these services, and states or districts may choose to work closely with other organizations, such as those offering adult education.

State Programs Under Way

The following programs illustrate what types of family education programs are in place. Some are sponsored by states, others by nonprofit groups or universities, but all illustrate the variety of efforts in place at the state level.

• Missouri's **"Parents as Teachers"** (PAT) program is based on the belief that the first few years of a child's life are the most crucial in getting him or her off to a good start and in preventing problems before they arise. Offered through the state's 543 school districts, it includes visits by professional educators, group meetings with other parents and developmental screening for participating children. This variety of approaches provides parents with information about their preschooler's social, cognitive and physical development.

In the 1987-88 school year, the program served more than 50,000 families (about 30% of those eligible), and the state hopes to expand services to more families.

Basic goals of the PAT program are to increase parents' knowledge of child development and allow them to understand their child's development and physical progress, increase parents' confidence in child-rearing activities, identify conditions that might inhibit a child's normal development and bring parents and schools together long before children enter school. **(Parents As Teachers National Center, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63121-4499).**

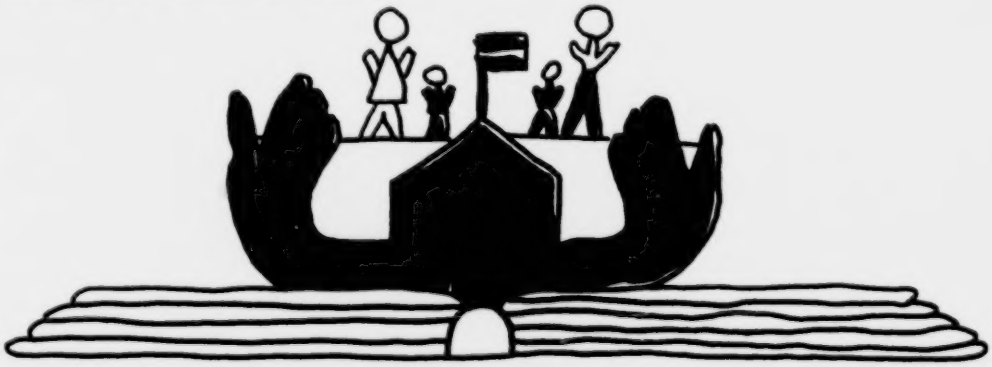
• Arkansas' Home Instruction Program **for Preschool Youngsters** (HIPPY) was expected to serve approximately 1,000 families during the 1987-88 school year. It is designed to prepare educationally disadvantaged children for successful beginnings in the public schools by teaching parents how to help their children at home.

Mothers of 4- and 5-year-olds are helped to work with their children in the home for 15 minutes a day, five days a week, 30 weeks per year for two years. Paraprofessionals who come to the home use role-playing as a method to teach the mothers how to use educational materials.

The HIPPY program has had an interesting ripple effect: parents in both urban and rural communities are requesting literacy classes, pursuing GEDs and continuing their educations, according to program officials. Parents with children in higher grades are participating more frequently in parent/teacher conferences and student and school programs. **(HIPPY, State Capitol Building, Little Rock, Arkansas 72201)**

• As part of a much larger dropout prevention program, **Michigan** instituted the **Hispanic Students Dropout Prevention Project.** Centered around weekly parent training sessions, it is geared toward three aspects of parental development — how to get information, how to take advantage of community resources (library, cultural/social events) and how to use good parenting techniques (skill development and motivation).

Parents take part in sessions on home management, understanding the school system, student and parent rights and responsibilities, use of community resources and how to communicate with adolescents. **(Antonio Flores, Hispanic Education Coordinator, Michigan Department of Education, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, Michigan 48909)**



• The **Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program** is designed to strengthen families by helping parents reinforce their children's schooling at home and by providing opportunities to help childrer develop to their full potential. All families with young children are eligible to participate.

The program is based on two premises: (1) the early years of a child's life are critical in terms of physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth; and (2) during these important years, parents are children's first and most significant teachers. It also stresses that parents have the right and the

responsibility to share in decisions about their child's education.

Early childhood teachers are responsible for establishing and maintaining frequent contacts with families. **(Early Childhood Family Education Program, Minnesota Department of Education, 992 Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101)**

Another Minnesota program gives parents more control over their children's education by allowing them to choose which public school their children will attend. **Access to Excellence** guarantees students and their parents the right to select a school, a move which has inspired schools to improve and which has won approval from a majority of the public, state officials said. One hundred percent of parents whose children participated in the enrollment options programs said they plan to continue with the program in the next school year. **(Ruth Randall, Commissioner of Education, Minnesota Department of Education, 712 Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101)**

- **Family Focus in Illinois** operates on the assumption that if parents are helped, children will be helped. Through education, support, information and advocacy services, the program promotes the competence, self-esteem and well-being of parents as a way to encourage the optimal development of children and prevent learning problems from occurring.

All services are based on an innovative prevention strategy and share the philosophy that parents are the best teachers of their children. The community-based, nonprofit, family support agency operates six community-based centers and one parent cooperative affiliate in the Chicago metropolitan area. It serves more than 5,000 families each year. Family Focus is a model for hundreds of family resource programs throughout the country. **(West Town Family Focus, 1450 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60622)**

- The Citizens Education Center Northwest sponsors a **Parent Leadership Training Project** in cooperation with the Washington State Migrant Council. It is designed to promote academic success among children at risk of school failure by helping their parents be effective partners in their children's academic growth.

Parents take part in 12 training sessions that focus on such topics as what the children learned in preschool, how to build on what they learned in school, rights and responsibilities of parents, student testing, special programs and resources, parent-teacher relations and detecting children's school problems early. **(Citizens Education Center Northwest, 105 South Main Street, Seattle, Washington 98104)**

What States Can Do

States interested in implementing a comprehensive family education program should consider the following suggestions, gleaned from a variety of resources and individuals working with family education programs.

- Keep mandates to a minimum and emphasize strategies that encourage local initiation of programs.
- Keep the concept of family education broad when encouraging and promoting it. Include the emotional, social and physical aspects of childrearing and family life, as well as the cognitive aspects, and stress the importance of parental participation in children's lives.
- Encourage school systems to include programs on child care for infants and toddlers to help focus on the fact that a positive early childhood is indeed important for children and to illustrate why parent education is beneficial.
- Establish with school sponsorship a special parent education program for parents when their kids are nearing adolescence, identified by researchers as second only to the first three years for causing parental stress.
- Design family education programs to accommodate the diversity of families and communities. This includes making a variety of support and information available and making the curriculum relevant for a variety of families.
- Root the programs in reality, with realistic expectations of what the programs should accomplish.
- Include all types of parents, not just the disadvantaged, in education programs.
- Enlist local effort and resources, especially the talents of parents themselves. PTA members, for example, could be recruited to organize and coordinate parent education programs. These people might be paid on a per-diem basis or provided with a tax credit in recognition of their services to parents.
- Encourage local districts to integrate family education into all levels of the school curriculum.
- Consider a tax break or some other incentive for parents who take part in family education programs. One possibility is to allow a parent who has completed a certain number of hours in a parent education program to teach or counsel a school class on the subject of parenting.
- Build nonschool coalitions for family education at the state level and encourage their formation at the district level, enlisting the support and interest of senior citizens and other persons whose children are grown.

- Use and coordinate all available family and human services to develop a comprehensive effort.
- Encourage schools and districts to work more closely with service providers in their communities.
- Seek media coverage to build acceptance for such programs by publicizing exemplary local programs in the state, for example.

Home Activities

Another way to improve the home environment and help families to be more instrumental in their children's education is for states and schools to support parents' efforts to work with their children at home. This can be done by tying home activities to family education programs such as those discussed above.

In a 1986 study by family researcher Joyce Epstein, more than 80% of parents "said they could spend more time helping their children at home if they were shown how to do specific learning activities." Another study found that "home-based strategies" got parents more involved than "school-based strategies."

To accomplish strong family and home relations and to help parents become more instrumental in the education of their children, Dorothy Rich, founder and president of the Home-School Institute, suggests that states need "to build on the significant research supporting the family role as educator, over the more traditional parent involvement roles such as volunteers in schools and parents on advisory councils." States also need "to promote equity in parent involvement, focusing on what all parents can do **at home**, rather than at school, which limits the number of parents who can participate," she says.

All parents are capable of taking certain simple steps to help their children excel. These include supportive actions such as making sure the children go to bed at a reasonable hour and are well-nourished. It also includes talking to their children about expectations, activities and the importance of school.

Researcher Susan Phillips, in a study of Milwaukee schools, found that "parent actions in the home and the psychological process of creating positive expectations also are likely to matter in school performance." In fact, schools that do well with parental involvement efforts back up those actions with early educational nurturing and positive educational expectations for the child, she says. If parents don't understand the importance of both the home and school environments, students are not likely to do well.

States wondering where to start should begin with programs for parents of preschool children. When parents understand what skills their children need to enter school, they can help prevent learning difficulties that appear later. Parental responsibilities for their children's education do not end there, however. It is important that families continue to function as educators throughout their children's school lives, although their role changes. While parental involvement programs are infrequent in upper elementary and secondary schools, evaluations of existing programs suggest that they do help improve achievement. Evaluations found:

- Reduced absenteeism
- Higher achievement scores
- Improved student behavior
- Restored confidence and participation among parents
- Greater parent support and communication with schools
- Greater parent participation in children's learning and development

How Teachers Can Help

Teachers also have developed a variety of practices for involving parents in the home. These include:

- Activities emphasizing reading, such as asking parents to read to their children or listen to their children read.
- Learning through discussion, such as asking parents to watch a special television program with their children and discuss it afterward.
- Informal learning activities at home, such as sending home ideas for family games or activities related to school work.
- Contracts between teachers and parents, such as formal agreements for parents to supervise and assist children with homework.
- Developing teaching and evaluation skills in parents, such as explaining techniques for teaching or for making learning materials.

Home learning activities are often distributed by teachers, but they do not necessarily have to come from the school. Some hospitals can provide information to parents still in the hospital with their baby, and doctors' offices and clinics distribute follow-up materials. Social service organizations and churches are also good sources for reaching community members, as are businesses.

State Programs Under Way

• The **Cooperative Communication Between Home and School** program was developed at Cornell University to help elementary school teachers and parents learn how to work together. Facilitated by Cooperative Extension agents, the program encourages schools to establish their own teams based on local talents and to involve at least one community organization as a sponsor.

Parents meet for six two-and-one-half-hour sessions, and teachers for two full-day inservice sessions. Both groups learn techniques for making conferences effective, methods to resolve conflicts cooperatively and communications skills.

As a result, parents find new ways to contribute to the classroom, including volunteering many hours to the school and initiating joint projects with other schools. Parents also give teachers more feedback, run for PTA office more often and express themselves better in conferences. "Parents who participated in this program have a better perspective on their children's education. They are much less fearful of the school," said one principal.

In turn, teachers become better listeners and use more open-ended questions in conferences. They are also less defensive with parents in difficult situations and have more collegial relationships with each other. **(Cooperative Communication Between Home and School, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853)**

• **The Home and School Institute** of Washington, D.C., has developed "home learning recipes" that contribute to families interacting more with one another and improving school achievement without duplicating school activities.

Suggested home activities, such as selecting special television programs for the family to watch and talk about, and setting up "chore charts" for families to figure out who does what and when, are easy to follow and aimed at improving basic skills. They concentrate on reinforcing and practicing academic subjects, teaching a useful daily life skill to children and meeting the time needs of today's working parents. **(The Home and School Institute, 1201 16th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20036)**

• The **Studying at Home** course was developed by the Academic Development Institute (ADI) and is offered through its Family Study Institute program in Chicago. It seeks to improve the attitudes and academic achievement of students by recruiting their parents to participate in a three-week intervention program.

Parents meet once a week, following a structured curriculum taught by parents previously trained in a small-group format. At the end of each session, parents are asked to complete certain tasks with their children during the week. The tasks are designed to increase positive interaction between parents and children and to establish regular, parent-monitored study in the home.

An evaluation of the program showed that parents who participated had positive attitudes toward learning, their ability to influence their children and their feelings of responsibility for their children's education. **(Academic Development Institute, 1712 S. Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60616)**

• **Q.E.P., the Quality Education Project**, began in California in 1982 as a nonprofit corporation established to improve the scholastic achievement of disadvantaged students by bringing parents back into an active role in their children's education. New Jersey selected the program as the model for its "Partners in Learning" initiative.

Q.E.P. has six main components: **The Parent Pledge** — asks parents to sign a pledge saying that they will support the school in six essential ways; **The Weekly Folder** — sent home every week for the parents' review and signature; **The Resource Manual** — includes summer home activities for the children, parent/teacher conference ideas, sample monthly newsletters for teachers and administrators and home-school communication tips; **The Parent Training Programs** — offers training in parenting, how to support the school at home and district curriculum ideas; **The Home Survey** — assesses parents' attitudes toward communication and other areas; and **The Community Event** — suggests fun, varied projects that build support for the school. **(Q.E.P., 136 Sand Hill Circle, Menlo Park, California 94025)**

• For more than 90 years, the **PTA** has worked to involve parents in their children's schooling and to serve as an advocate for children. The National PTA provides a wealth of brochures and other information to help parents. Topics range from helping children read, to talking to them about sex, to making parent/teacher conferences work, to working with other parents.

State and local PTA affiliates also offer a variety of services. The Spring Garden Elementary School PTA in Bedford, Texas, for example, recruits volunteers to help with reading programs or activities such as Teacher Appreciation Week. It conducts orientations for volunteers and staff and sponsors events such as cultural arts programs and family nights, as well as teacher scholarships. A Richland, Washington, affiliate focuses on preventing substance abuse and raising self-esteem. Teachers and parents have pledged to have drug-free lifestyles. Straub Elementary School in Maysville, Kentucky, offers hearing and eye testing and sponsors a program to educate parents on how to teach their children about drugs. **(National PTA, 700 N. Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611-2571)**

What States Can Do

States can play a very important role in providing training to help school officials work more cooperatively with parents. They could provide, for example:

• Workshops for school staff on the role of family life in student achievement, on how to have effective parent-teacher conferences and how to use small computers to correspond with homes.

• Workshops to teach parents skills that help their children learn through talking, reading, cultural exposure, homework assistance and other activities.

• Consultations to help administrators initiate and cultivate collaboration at the school site and to assist staff in planning special projects

A statewide task force on families as educators can be used to develop a plan for the state. Possible activities include:

• Conduct a media campaign on the importance of families as educators.

• Provide support for public-service radio and television announcements and newspaper ads on what the family can do at home.

• Obtain home learning systems for localities to distribute to families and schools.

• Direct state teacher-training institutions and school systems to train teachers on how to involve parents in helping their own children.

States also can ask or require that state-funded programs such as principals' academies provide training to administrators on how to prepare teachers to work with families. Other states provide examples of myriad other approaches to draw families into the school.

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Improving the School Environment

The school volunteer movement . . . builds bridges between the home, the community and the school. As the school volunteer program is extended, we will improve the quality of the public schools.

Ernest Boyer

Direct parental involvement in the schools can help improve the school environment and provide the schools with invaluable talents and ideas. Some states, schools and districts have formalized this type of involvement with governance councils, and many recruit parents as volunteers to perform a variety of tasks within a school. While parents made up the bulk of school volunteers a generation ago, older citizens, students, business employees and other individuals are becoming increasingly interested in working with their local schools.

Volunteers

Most states do not sponsor school volunteer programs themselves, but some are exploring the use of alternative sponsors and collaborators, such as universities, to develop and lead statewide volunteer programs.

There are more than 1,000 volunteer programs in school districts across the country with more than four million volunteers taking part. About one-third of these are parents, according to a National School Volunteer Program (NSVP) survey.

Just as school volunteers differ widely in their backgrounds and interests, so do their roles and activities differ in educational settings. Activities range from teaching young parents how to work with their children to helping high school students explore ways to finance college.

The heart of most volunteer programs remains the tutorial component. Tutors work one-to-one with students who need extra help in an area, and studies show this relationship is often the key to the child's success in school.

The increase in the number of students whose first language is not English has created a huge demand for bilingual volunteers. These persons often work with teachers in the classroom to provide students with explanations in his or her first language, a factor that often keeps these students from falling behind as a result of language barriers.

Resource volunteers talk to children about careers, hobbies and interests. Others lead after-school clubs, many of which could not exist without the leadership of volunteers. Library volunteers work with students on projects and assist with circulation and collections. Schools are always in need of clerical volunteers to assist with typing, telephoning and secretarial tasks.

These volunteers do not, however, just "drop in" and offer their services to the school. Each volunteer must be recruited, interviewed, screened and given orientation as part of an organized program, says NSVP. Each program is different because it is designed to meet specific local needs through use of that community's resources.

Volunteer programs are most effective when they are carefully planned and placed within the existing governance structures of the school districts. Successful volunteer programs are integral parts of instruction, curriculum, staff development, administration and school management. The NSVP suggests seven factors are needed to institutionalize programs.

• **District-level support.** The school board and the superintendent express their strong support for volunteer activities by including funding in the budget. The superintendent creates an atmosphere in which principals and teachers feel comfortable about making changes that will enable them to use volunteers effectively.
• **A written policy of support.** The school board has a formal policy supporting the program. Such a policy can quickly overcome the traditional barriers that keep volunteers out of some aspects of school life, such as management, curriculum development and instruction.
• **A systemwide manager.** Placing one person in charge of managing volunteers often spells the difference between an effective enterprise and an amateurish one.
• **Building-level managers.** School principals designate a staff member to coordinate volunteers within a school.
• **People.** The focus is on involving people, not on procuring money.
• **Options for volunteers.** The roles of volunteers in the schools are not confined to raising funds and providing clerical assistance. Other options include service as tutors, as mentors, as resource instructors (working closely with teachers), as staff developers, as technical advisers, as counselors and as members of advisory boards. Carefully chosen volunteers can add both breadth and depth to school enrichment programs.
• **Collaborative, long-range planning.** School volunteers are actively involved in the long-range planning that affects other dimensions of a school's operations—from curriculum and instruction to management procedures.

State Programs Under Way

• In **Pennsylvania**, the multifaceted **Generations Together Program** allows students and senior citizens to share their enthusiasm and skills with one another through five separate programs. The overall effort is housed at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Social and Urban Research.

Funded by Westinghouse, the Artist Resource Program brings poets, potters, musicians, art collectors, doll makers, dancers and other artists—most ranging in age from 55 to 70—into the schools to enrich the classroom activities. Some of these volunteers even provide private art or music lessons to interested students at no cost.

The Senior Citizen School Volunteer Program provides opportunities for the elderly to serve as resource persons in the schools. The Youth in Service to Elders Program trains student volunteers to provide friendly visiting services to homebound or institutionalized senior citizens in their community.

Project Telefriend, a non-crisis telephone reassurance program for children, pairs one or more children with an older volunteer who calls the children regularly. Providers of Intergenerational Childcare trains older adults who are interested in becoming child-care providers. **(Generations Together Program, 811 William Pitt Union, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260)**

• Legislation to promote school volunteer programs in **Florida** has provided a strong impetus to school districts to implement volunteer and parent effectiveness programs.

Funding is provided for matching grants to school districts to promote and extend school volunteer programs. Districts must match the funds. Any district submitting a plan receives $2,000, and additional money is based on the number of elementary and secondary schools offering basic programs.

"State-level support and funding is enabling Florida school districts to use their community resources more efficiently and effectively to improve and enhance a wide variety of education programs," state officials said. Such programs include career education, adult and community education, school volunteers, vocational training programs and business partnerships.

State records show 135,551 volunteers have provided more than 5.5 million hours of service. Figured at $10 per hour, state schools received more than $55.7 million for the 1987 effort alone. **(Office of Business and Citizen Partnerships, 228 Knott Building, Tallahassee, Florida 32399)**

• **The New Hampshire School Volunteer Program** recruited about 10,500 persons, many of them parents, to serve in the schools in the 1986-87 school year. Volunteers contributed more than 325,000 hours to 250 schools, a 15% increase over the previous year, according to Nancy C. Craig, director. "We commend the leaders of local programs for their successful efforts in expanding programs despite the prevalence of two-parent working families," she said.

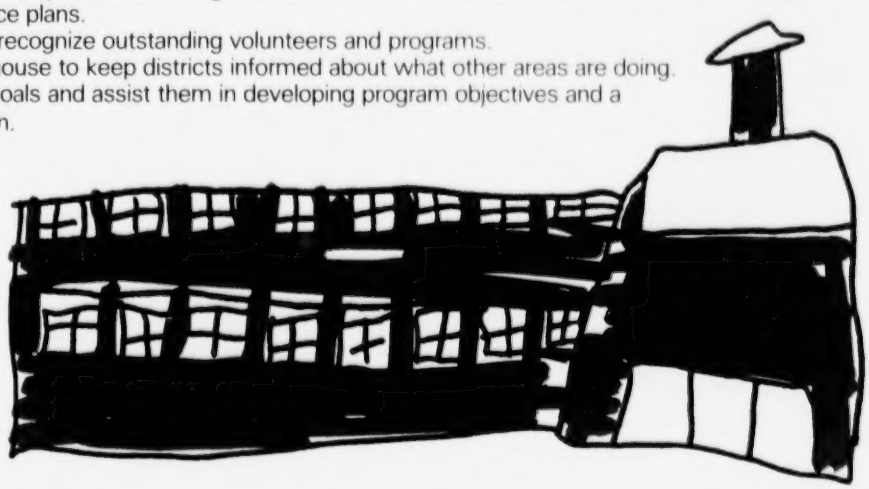
The program looks upon volunteerism and partnerships as "essential links for school improvement." Volunteers receive a variety of training opportunities, ranging from working with children with special needs to workshops and manuals on math, language arts, oral history, child development, computers, organizational skills, enrichment, library skills, substance abuse and numerous other topics. All materials are free to schools or local programs wishing to develop a volunteer program.

One aspect of the program is the New Hampshire Community Education Center, which strives to help communities and schools work together to promote and implement community education and community/school partnerships. Partnerships considered worthy of statewide recognition have been honored at conferences the past two years. **(New Hampshire Volunteer Program, 196 Bridge Street, Manchester, New Hampshire 03104)**

What States Can Do

States can be the primary impetus in sparking large, coordinated volunteer programs in the schools. To begin, they can:

- Examine the needs of the state to determine where school volunteers would be most useful. They can also consider the resources of the state and encourage local districts to do the same.
- Build a coalition of groups to be involved in volunteer programs and ask the members to contact their local representatives to begin planning community programs.
- Select a statewide volunteer coordinator to provide technical assistance to districts during the early stages of organization.
- Communicate state requirements or regulations for school volunteers to districts, such as health checkups or insurance plans.
- Plan a program to recognize outstanding volunteers and programs.
- Provide a clearinghouse to keep districts informed about what other areas are doing.
- Help districts set goals and assist them in developing program objectives and a system for evaluation.



Governance

School councils have become a common method of ensuring parent participation in the many decisions that affect the education of their children. Many such advisory councils were required by the federal Title I and Head Start programs, and states have modeled the idea in numerous school reform measures.

Councils vary dramatically in function, relationships with others and structure. Some serve merely to provide services to the school. Others serve as a way to guarantee that parents have a say-so in major school decisions.

What councils do depends on their relationship with those they advise. No school council can be any more or less successful than the level of collaboration among the key people at a specific site. In the complex relationship between school and council, the principal is most important. His or her support, as well as that of the school district administration, is critical if the council is to operate successfully. Likewise, council members themselves must understand and support the panel's function, a factor that can be enhanced by training for members.

State Programs Under Way

- In **Colorado,** accountability councils have existed since the legislature passed the Accountability Act of 1971. That act was later defined to mean long-range planning for educational improvement that involves the entire community.

At the heart of this process is the accountability committee, a citizens' panel that advises the local school board. A school district must have such a committee to be accredited. This group reviews, recommends and examines the district's educational programs, focusing on what programs are offered and how well they are presented. **(Office of Field Services, 201 E. Colfax Street, Denver, Colorado 80203)**

• **South Carolina's School Improvement Councils** originated in the state's 1977 Education Finance Act. That act required that each school board establish an "advisory council" at each school in the district. Those councils had to include at least two parents elected by the parents of children enrolled in the school, at least two teachers elected by the faculty, at least two students in schools with grades 9 and above, other representatives of the community and persons selected by the principal. These councils were instructed by law to help prepare an annual school report, to assist the principal and carry out any duties prescribed by the local board.

The passage of the Education Improvement Act (EIA) in 1984 renamed the panels "School Improvement Councils," thereby changing the focus from advising to working to improve schools. The law provided for and funded the training of councils and created a School Incentive Fund to reward and recognize schools for exceptional performance.

Evaluations listed improved school/community relations, increased parental involvement and more information for parents among council accomplishments. However, the councils were hindered by a lack of understanding of the council's role, lack of time to meet, lack of support from principals or administrators, lack of funding and lack of communication with the school board. **(The School Council Assistance Project, College of Education, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208)**

What States Can Do

To give parents a formal voice in school affairs, states can take several steps to ensure that councils are workable. South Carolina has successfully done several of the following activities.

- Make expectations of what the council should accomplish clear and realistic. Relate council goals directly to the improved achievement of students, and help local districts develop plans to accomplish them.
- Allow for flexibility at the local level. Each school has its own problems and its own climate.
- Institute and fund statewide conferences to provide basic information on the roles and responsibilities of and laws governing school councils.
- Sponsor yearly regional workshops to help school councils develop their plans and implementation and evaluation procedures.
- Develop workshops that can be replicated at the building level to help parents develop the necessary skills and abilities to become involved in educational decision making and policy making. Include information on state-level policy and regulations.
- Hold teleconferences to get and give information and develop networks among various councils.
- Develop a televised training program that can be aired near the beginning of each school year. This can be especially helpful in familiarizing new council members with their new roles and responsibilities and how the school improvement process works.
- Institute and fund an office of technical assistance to help school council members.

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Strategies for State Action

State programs that address the needs of all families for useful information and involvement in their children's education give something back to families and citizens for their education tax dollars.

Joyce L. Epstein

Although efforts to involve parents in education must be centered in the schools, states can aid the process in several ways. Primarily, they can be leaders — the inspiration for schools to bring families into the schools. They can also make parental involvement efforts possible by encouraging and funding creative, exciting initiatives for schools and by passing legislation that makes the state's commitment official. The following ideas were provided at a May 1988 invitational conference on the family, sponsored by Missouri Governor John Ashcroft.

Provide Leadership

State officials can use their positions and visibility in states to promote family involvement. For instance, they can:

- Create a **climate** that fosters and supports greater family participation in the schools.
- Demonstrate a **positive attitude** about the importance of families involved in the education of their children and point out the link between parental involvement and student achievement.
- Raise **public awareness** about the economic and social benefits of an adult community supportive of and involved in the education of its children.

Wisconsin: Leading the Way

With the designating of the 1987-88 school year as the "Year of the Family in Education," Wisconsin began an initiative to heighten awareness about the importance of families in their children's education.

Family and Education Forums were held in each of the state's cooperative educational service agencies. A variety of individuals — educators, family representatives and human service providers — came together to discuss the issues and exchange ideas. They looked at the role of the family in education and recommended actions to encourage families and schools to form a stronger partnership.

Making greater use of existing resources, such as the University of Wisconsin Extension, and more intensive dissemination of successful programs and activities, were among the suggestions expected to go to the 29 members of the Year of the Family in Education statewide advisory team, and, ultimately, to Herbert Grover, the state school superintendent.

Federal Laws on Parent Involvement

A number of federal education programs have required or encouraged the involvement of parents since their inception. However, the 1988 federal education amendments strengthen this interest through three programs: Chapter I, Even Start and Family-School Partnerships.

Chapter I

Local school districts receiving funds under Chapter I, the compensatory education bill designed to help poor and other disadvantaged families, must set up formal parent involvement programs. Parents must be included in planning and/or implementing the program. While Chapter I, and its predecessor, Title I, always have required parents to be involved, the new provisions are more extensive than previous ones and emphasize the role of parents as educators.

The law recommends a number of parent programs, activities and procedures, such as regular conferences, parent councils, special personnel to work with parents in the home and the provision of materials for parents to use in the home to reinforce the school.

Even Start

Even Start is designed to integrate early childhood and adult education for parents into one program to improve educational opportunities for children. Local programs must include recruitment and screening procedures, transportation, child care and "instructional programs that promote adult literacy, training parents to support the educational growth of their children and preparation of children for success in regular school programs."

Family-School Partnerships

This program authorizes demonstration grants for innovative and promising partnerships. The purpose is to encourage local school districts to increase the involvement of parents in education.

Such partnerships should help families work with their children at home to improve achievement and instill positive attitudes toward education; train teachers and staff to work with families; train families to build educational partnerships; and evaluate how well family involvement activities are working, what barriers prevent family participation and what steps are needed to expand participation.

Encourage Innovations

States can make it possible for schools and districts to implement exciting programs to involve parents through such means as:

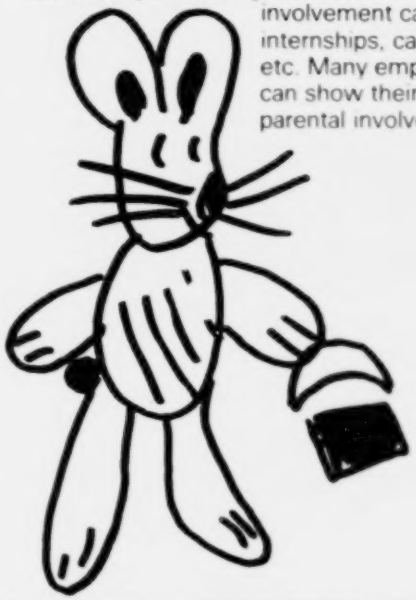
- **Creative funding.** States can fund demonstration projects, provide schools with grants for family involvement programs, consider incentives or recognition for corporations that make it easy for their employees to be involved in the schools, compensate districts for technical assistance provided to other districts, make family involvement part of school reform funding packages and encourage corporate "mini-grants" to schools to develop programs that involve families.
- **Recognition programs.** Most states already have some type of recognition program that could be expanded to include parental involvement efforts. States can, for example, develop programs to single out districts, schools and other efforts that facilitate parental involvement; set up the means to recognize individual teachers, administrators, parents and community members for exceptional

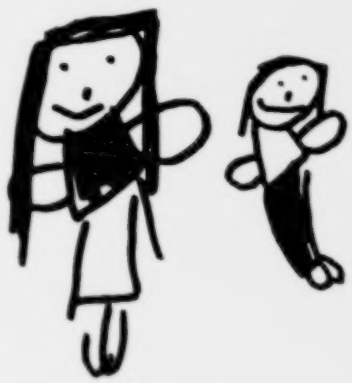
participation in home/school programs; and acknowledge businesses with innovative programs that allow employees to participate in local schools.

- **Technical assistance.** States can provide school districts and schools with technical assistance in the area of family involvement. They can, for example, set up parent centers in different parts of the state where parents can take part in workshops and get materials on how to help their child; establish a clearinghouse for information about promising programs, important research and good ideas for programs and practices; train individuals to work with local districts in setting up parent groups and getting more parents involved.
- **Models.** Model and demonstration programs can help school districts understand what is possible. States could develop such projects to serve as models, using either state funding or soliciting private funding. In addition, the state can serve as a model itself, setting the example of an employer who makes it possible and easy for employees to work more closely with the schools.
- **Training.** Another step states can take to facilitate better school/family relationships is to see that school officials know how to involve their students' families and have the resources to do it. Inservice and preservice training should be provided for teachers and administrators to instruct them on how to work with different types of families. Training programs for students and other interested adults would help them learn how to work with younger children in the schools.

Parents can benefit from workshops, published information, hotlines and training sessions that help them understand and guide their children better. Such education programs should be supplemented with support that makes it possible for parents to attend, such as child care. Certain teachers could be selected for additional training to help them become specialists in family involvement, who could then work with parents, other teachers and administrators to build stronger relationships between the home and school.

- **Coordination.** States can expand the coordination among and involvement of existing social agencies with community organizations and with parents. In addition, they should recognize and draw on the full range and variety of resources available in the state (such as senior citizens' groups, churches, professional and civic organizations) and coordinate efforts with local and state school volunteer programs.
- **Business partnerships.** States can encourage business to get involved in the schools. Business involvement can take many forms, including providing resource volunteers, internships, career awareness programs, career counseling, adopt-a-school, etc. Many employees and their customers are also parents, and businesses can show their concern for children and their education by promoting parental involvement.





U.S. West Sponsors Education Seminar

"Choices" is a two-hour seminar for 9th graders on the importance of education. It is designed to help students understand adult realities and develop decision-making skills early, thereby avoiding poor decisions early in their lives, and the consequences of those decisions. The company believes that if students have better decision-making skills early, they will be more likely to take advantage of available education opportunities.

Missouri: A Model That Works

Missouri's Parents As Teachers program is a model that appears to be working. In an evaluation, the PAT children outperformed the control group in mental, social and language development. PAT parents proved significantly more knowledgeable about child development than the comparison group, and 99% said they were highly pleased with the program.

In addition to rave reviews from participants, the PAT program has gained national and international acclaim, winning one of 10 1987 Innovations in State and Local Government Awards from the Ford Foundation and John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Representatives from 26 states plus Canada and Great Britain have taken advantage of training offered by the national center.

Indiana: Thinking About College at an Early Age

Indiana has come up with a program to keep parents thinking about their children's education through junior and high school. In fact, it gets them thinking about the future.

The Indiana College Placement and Assessment Center assesses 8th and 9th graders in math, reading and writing. Using test scores and information provided in questionnaires, staff provide feedback to students and parents about the student's interest in college, ability to succeed in college and financial needs. Eventually, it will serve as a clearinghouse for information on state colleges and universities and provide information on courses, credits, financial aid, housing and other college issues.

In 1987, the center moved beyond a first-year effort involving nearly 5,000 students and their families to trying to reach each of the 70,000 9th graders in the state. **(State of Indiana College Placement and Assessment Center, 2805 E. Tenth Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47405)**

Support Legislation

State support of better family/school relationships requires the state to emphasize legislation that makes family involvement possible and to get rid of that which hinders it. To do so, states should:

- **Look at existing policies** to determine if they stifle school creativity in involving families in schools.
- **Design policies** that enable parents, teachers, schools and the community to work together.
- **Consider waivers** or exemptions from rules and regulations that get in the way of good family involvement programs.
- **Recommend and support interagency collaboration** at the state and local levels to provide more comprehensive programs and services for schools and families and to avoid duplication of services.
- **Include in legislation** the funding and provisions needed to involve families in education and to train teachers, administrators, social workers and others how to work with families.
- **Include parents as representatives** on state accountability committees.
- **Encourage state teacher training institutions** to upgrade their programs in the areas of home-school relationships and teacher-parent communication.
- **Fund a state office of parental involvement** to assist local efforts.

Janice's Story

Janice has been teaching in an affluent midwestern suburb for seven years. While most of her students come from middle- and upper-middle-class families, she notices dramatic differences in parent expectations and involvement in the school. She sees the research findings first hand: when parents are involved, students flourish academically and socially.

But too often the students with the greatest academic and behavioral problems are also those whose parents are most difficult to reach. "I get so frustrated — the parents of kids who are doing well are lined up at the door, anxious to do whatever they can to help me and their kids succeed. But the kids who are failing — trying to get their parents to even respond to a phone call is like pulling teeth.

"The only way to help these kids is to reach out to them and to their parents — force them to come in — and work as a team to define some roles and responsibilities. Not one of us can do it alone. We **have** to work together."

Washington Works on Teacher Knowledge

Recent legislation in Washington State requires that all teacher candidates demonstrate knowledge and skill in parent involvement. This includes ways to involve parents in their child's learning process and techniques for communicating with parents about the importance of helping their children learn. Teachers learn how to teach parents methods they can use to help their children achieve.

South Carolina: Legislation Strengthens Family Programs

Parental involvement got a boost in South Carolina with the passage of legislation to strengthen the involvement of parents in their children's education. Under the 1984 Education Improvement Act, the state board of education was given the power and responsibility to adopt policies and procedures that encourage the local districts to schedule regular conferences between parents and teachers and make parenting classes and seminars available. It also called for each school to have School Improvement Councils, with parent and teacher representation.

One function of the councils is to develop a School Improvement Plan that includes a section on home/school relations. To help the councils, the state funded a university-based technical assistance project to provide training and support activities. This School Council Assistance Project is studying how parents can assist in planning and implementing school improvement initiatives.

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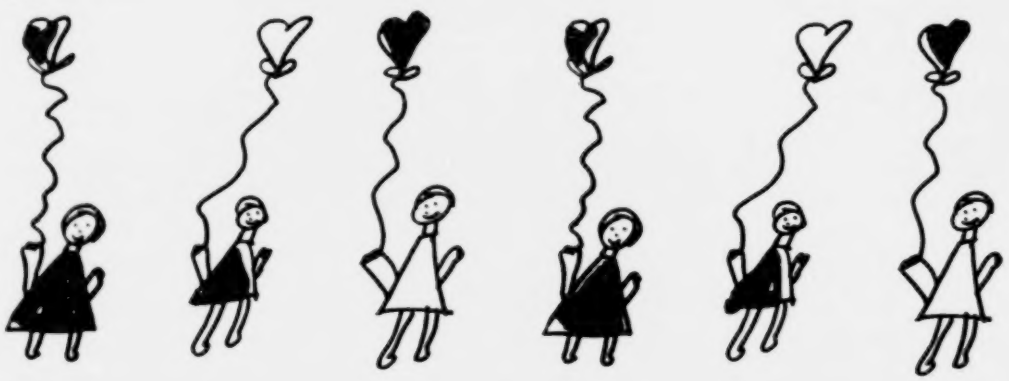

Ed's Story

Ed's involvement in the schools began when his son, Brian, began receiving failing grades in his first year of middle school. After several explosive arguments with the teachers and school administration, Ed began to look and listen.

Brian's problems were more than academic — his behavior disrupted the language arts class, and he was acting out in several of his other classes, particularly those with female teachers.

Ed soon learned that by working **with** the school he could help his child. After talking with the teachers, the assistant principal and the guidance counselor, Ed and Brian began to develop a strategy to improve his behavior and ultimately his academic achievement.

Ed has been actively involved in the school and in his son's education since. His advice? "Parents should get their feet in the door if they are unhappy. Let someone know they are unhappy. Then work **with** them to solve the problem."

Acknowledgments

ECS would like to thank the numerous individuals and organizations that worked so hard over the past year to make the parental involvement initiative successful. In particular, the individuals who took the time to take part in the May 1988 invitational conference in St. Louis provided invaluable comments and suggestions on what state policy makers can do to encourage better home/school relationships in their state. Their names are listed below, as are the names of others who helped plan the initiative during an earlier meeting.

Several ECS staff members also worked tirelessly to bring the project to fruition. Joni Finney and Patrick Callan guided and nurtured the efforts from start to finish. Lorna Franklin provided excellent staff support throughout this project, and Robert Palaich and Beverly Anderson added thoughtful comments on this report. Jan Mahan, an ECS volunteer, spent countless hours in preparation for the conference and in collecting information for this project. Anna West contributed editorial expertise.

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